Chapter 2

Blackness and a Black Identity

Identity is fundamental to one's self as a "knowing, feeling, and acting subject."[1] It is predicated on norms of identification,[2] including race, gender, class, sexuality, age, and disability—questionably designated as identity categories. Indeed, race identity, for example, has long been assimilated to a mode of existence that operated as a visual marker on the body—with the exceptions of these individuals who managed to "pass" for whites.[3] This reminds me of the court case *Rhinelander v. Rhinelander*, from the 1920s, in which Leonard K. Rhinelander, a white man, discovered that his wife Alice B. Rhinelander was black and wanted a divorce. Her lawyer's defense was that Mr. Rhinelander had to know that his wife was black when they were intimate even before the wedding. Certainly, whites have the luxury of dismissing racial identity when it shores up their interests.

The work of Angela Onwuachi-Willig provides us with "a formative lesson" on race and identity[4] and on the one-drop rule.[5] In order to show that Ms. Rhinelander was black, she "was asked by her lawyer and the judge to bare her breasts to the jury."[6] And while "similar experiences of the body repeat in the lives of blacks,"[7] for black women, her breast is the timely reminder that she *becomes* a woman. I think Walter Benn Michaels provides one way of thinking about passing by asking the right questions: "How then is passing possible?" "How is it possible to pass for something without becoming what it is you pass for?" "How is it possible to pass at all?"[8] These questions, which help us think about a black identity, as Michaels goes on to say, "in a racial system where racial identity is a function of physical appearance—where it is the color of your skin,"[9] show that race is not the sort of identity that can be hidden. Race is real and is lived in its corporeality. This is a fact that cannot be denied. As we will

see later, Michael Jackson's racial self-fashioning, seemingly, *not black*, *not white*, creates a quandary for a black identity undertook as a bodily mark.

Certainly, the corporeality of race is the criterion by which blacks are judged "irrespective of their social or educational attainments."[10] I can see, then, why Howard Winant would put forward that "race is not a matter of color alone. . . . It is more like a way of life, a way of being."[11] This way of being is very similar to Frantz Fanon's notion of race as epidermalized. Indeed, epidermalization reduces the body "to skin,"[12] "to flesh."[13] It becomes a category of the visual, the seen, and it readily and impeccably denotes the body socially. This manifestation is a pressing concern for blacks' identification process, which for blacks is the hallmark of their lived experiences. In this sense, we would disagree with Paul Gilroy's *Against Race: Imaging Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* in which he asserts that "the idea of epidermalization points toward one intermediate stage in a critical theory of body scales in the making of race. Today skin is no longer privileged as the threshold of even identity or particularity."[14] In other words, Gilroy suggests that we give up the idea of race altogether because race, in his words, "can have no ethically defensible place."[15] Gilroy believes that race is a representation and not a presentation that is always already there to be read as a detriment to the social body when black.

This is why we cannot dismiss Fanon's exemplary reasoning that race is evidently fixed on the body. To use the idiom "skin deep," that always already positioned blacks as the "other," these other things, inferior and lacking any kind of racial transcendence, is paramount. Notwithstanding such an eye-opener, race as a bodily mark does not stop the discourse on colorblindness in its newly founded manifesto to reject the meaning of race in regulating social outcomes and to retreat from the original usage of colorblindness in the 1896 landmark case *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In *Plessy*, Justice John Marshall Harlan emphasized that the Constitution is color-blind and to rob one of one's rights because of race was indeed unconstitutional. In the age of multiculturalism and the politics of recognition, the colorblind discourse, going against Harlan's signature conceptualization of colorblindness, is currently making its most noteworthy mark in the political crucible of America's race relations to disavow race. Precisely for this reason, Cornel West, in his cartography of race matters in the United States, is right to remind us that "race matters" because "race is the most explosive issue in American life."[16] And if Fanon's conceptualization that race is epidermalized is correct, in the end, "no one can completely 'pass' because there will always be some sign, some trace of one's true identity.

Moreover, when you are discovered as black, whites bitterly complain about blacks in disgust, "Don't forget. Don't think that you are above race, that you're one of us."[17] After all, you are just a black; you are raced; not like us white folk who are, in Ruth Frankenberg's words, "just human."[18] And it is from this position that whites are able to declare with an air of certainty: "I am not that other."[19]

For blacks, the abiding truth is that, in the words of Charles Mills, "race is so enduringly constitutive of their identity and so enduringly central to white racial consciousness"[20] that race is the signifier, which, even though it is relational and not essential, has a fixed meaning of corporeality and subjects blacks to ill treatment. In other words, blacks cannot sidestep the exclusionary practice of corporeal identity formation; race is the signifier that is pegged to the other signifiers, such as gender, sexuality, disability, and class. The latter, for example, even though it can be hidden behind conduct, language, dress, and, these days, upward racial mobility, the veneer of black success, are viewed as "honorary whites." Nonetheless, one must admit that "honorary whites" is an exceedingly racially charged term,[21] signifying racial difference precisely through its very discursive practice; for example, its claim to be colorblind; that is, not to see race. However, because America's class system is distinctively racialized, blacks are still assumed to be lower class. So it definitely was for American media mogul Oprah Winfrey while traveling in Switzerland. As attests her notorious altercation with a heedless store attendant in a posh Swiss boutique who refused to show her an expensive handbag (38,000 US$) assuming [how wrongly!] that it "was too expensive."[22] So, what can we say about race as a signifier? Race is inescapable. It is like eating to stay alive.

The common signifier of race as "overdetermined from the outside"—that is, a view of race from the "outside"—has certain implications for a compliant racial identification and social subordination. This, when opened to numerous varieties of self-knowledge, attempts to destroy a black person's capacity for self-knowing or, according to the ancient Greek maxim, "know thyself." However, blacks cannot know themselves because what is often called a black "self" is constructed from whiteness. In this sense, one can see why a black person can have difficulties in developing their sense of "self" and to hold on to one's truth, to one's self. Further, because race is never left to its own devices, always surrounded by an atmosphere of antagonism, and is normally dishonored, for blacks, one of the repercussions is an ambivalent self-identification, a denial of the "self."

With significant insistence, Michael Jackson expresses this very idea in his song "I Can't help it" in which he says, "I look in my mirror and it took me by surprise. . . . I can't help it if I wanted to."[23] The ambivalent image of himself that he catches in the mirror exemplifies the complex nature of a black identity reduced to its corporeality. In fact, as we will see later, all the derogative discourses about Michael Jackson are rooted in his corporeality. Indeed, Michael Jackson's corporeal traces become increasingly more problematic to locate since, as he sings, it is *not black*, *not white*.[24] His racial positioning still signals blackness, as will be clearer in chapter 3, and conforms to the racial norms of blackness as a bodily mark. Blackness as a "device can purify the impure, . . . straying brothers and sisters," as Stuart Hall puts it.[25]

The fixation on blackness as a form of racial indifference where blackness gets in the way of human wholesomeness poses a constraint on blacks' lived experiences. And while we see that a black identity is fixed on the body, there is a contentious relationship of blackness to its outsideness, which can account for antiblack subjugation as a social fact. In any case, once a black identity is fixed on the outside, we treat it as if it were genetics and, as such, it is constantly policed and fashioned against whiteness as the norm.[26] Indeed, the aura of an authentic blackness, while set up to mask identity markers such as gender, class, and sexuality differences among blacks and which allows the illusion of sameness, feeds a special kind of comfort in America. It guarantees the status of whiteness as unraced and unmarked.[27]

Notwithstanding some common cultural particularities that are supposed to make blacks "authentically" blacks (e.g., there is an identifiable "black way" of singing and dancing),[28] there is, as Anthony Appiah points out, "this putative authenticity [that] screams out for recognition,"[29] and to which multiculturalism and its politics of cultural recognition subscribe. What is undesirable is the facticity of race that subjects blacks to an identity that is marked on the body.[30] It is precisely for this reason that these fretful responses to blackness construct are not surprising for Cornel West. Such a construct, he remarks, "rest[s] on a homogenizing impulse that assumed that all black people are really alike—hence obliterating differences (class, gender, sexual orientation) between black people."[31] Like West, bell hooks puts us on the right track when she famously states that there is "the assumption that there is a black essence shaping all African American experience."[32] In other words, the uniqueness that belongs to the individual is buried deep within their blackness and operates at the

level of an essentialized blackness, which determines how a black identity is perceived.

While blackness is wrought by the preeminence of whiteness and is constantly shaped and reshaped by a dominant white identity, blacks are trapped between performing and resisting whiteness. Consequently, racial self-identification develops into a pathological condition in which blacks' subjectivity becomes subjugated by a prosecutorial gaze that is directed through the episteme of whiteness. This experience of subjugation leads to an identity "crisis" and a misidentification where the "self" and "other" that provide an anchor for the social construction of whiteness and blackness respectively have become implicated. And even though Michael Jackson, for one, moves between identities *not black*, *not white*, where his body seemingly appears as a site of profound refusal that permits and controls the appearance and knowability of racial identity, his body, like all racialized bodies, is surrounded by an atmosphere of antagonism that comes with an "implicit knowledge" about the black body as damaged and fragmented, which has a nonliberating effect on his self-expression. This negative image of the black body has been constructed since the start of indentured servitude in America, which allowed for it to be degraded and mutilated. This, in different ways, is still imposed under the upholding and perpetuation of institutionalized violence on the black body.

Much as the inescapable blackness points to the fact that blacks suffer "in their bodies quite differently"[33] from whites, such grief attests to the performative power of whiteness. Whiteness not only functions as the norm but also it is part of a highly regulatory practice that constructs the black subject, in the words of Judith Butler, "as 'less' human, the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable."[34] However, there is something else. Fanon lets us see this; this is how he puts it: "When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place";[35] that is, the body is always ready for action. It is useful here to recall the example in chapter one of his book where Fanon describes, in great details, what he would have to physically do if he wanted to smoke. This is a good example of blacks being oriented toward an object, "a description of a 'body-at-home.' " As Sara Ahmed observes, it "is one that can inhabit whiteness"[36] and it feels a certain kind of "comfort" that "suggests well-being and satisfaction."[37] Indeed, as the idiom has it, "there is no place like home," a "body-at-home," "brought home," it seems to me, is not an accomplishment for the black subject, always dependent on the display of a particular "self."

Early in life, blacks are taught to stay in their "place." They are taught, in the name of racial order, not to go beyond certain limits. This is a practice somewhat hard to uphold because it does not come from autonomy or reflexivity. At first, the practice is matter of fact, distinct, and organized, and then it becomes customized and embodied in institutions, systems, laws, and policies that can be traced back to indentured servitude.[38] It is a practice that comes to us from a carefully crafted value system, promoting racial inequality.[39] It forces upon blacks the need to be always active even when we are asleep. In a word, our dreams are, for the most part, active. For me, one of the most interesting things is in the way a black person's dream is always active, or, in Fanon's words, "always of muscular dreams, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me."[40] And while there is no subject position behind the "I" but an "object" position that attaches itself to the "them," shaping blacks' existentiality, blackness has an ontological vigor of its own, which makes us, and even drives our actions. This is to say, being in the public sphere with others, making one's presence known through words, conducts, and acting in concert with each other, or, to put it differently, to be acknowledged and recognized by each other. Because we are all the same—"that is, human"[41]—plurality is a condition of human action, of being-in-the-world.[42]

In fact, in many instances, blacks have to seek out what Saidiya Hartman, in *Scenes of Subjection*, calls "a space for action,"[43] which is not usually available and accessible and is already compromised because there is never a "space" for blackness where whiteness is the norm. This "seeking out" can become reactional, which weakens a black person's "psychic structure" and, as a result, the ego/self collapses. When this happens, Fanon observes that "the black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth. That is, at the ethical level, self-esteem."[44] For blacks, then, one of the repercussions is an ambivalent self-identification, a denial of the self. First of all, "one ceases to experience one's identity from a locus of self-definition and begins to experience one's identity from a locus of externally imposed meaning."[45] That is to say, one is persistently in conflict with one's own persona[46] as the essential "other" of whiteness, fittingly corresponding to Jean-Paul Sartre's

idea that it is the anti-Semite that fashion the Jew or Simone de Beauvoir's concept of white women as the indispensable "other" of white men. In a way, this is what is referred to as "the order of otherness," to use Homi Bhabha's key phrase,[47] or, in Michel Foucault words, "the establishment of an order,"[48] which, in terms of a racial order, does not allow for blacks to be positioned outside of such an order.

In the end, because blacks are constructed as black, it is through this construction that blacks come to know themselves. Indeed, "no one knows yet who [blacks] are."[49] If a black person were to be asked for a definition of self, in Fanon's words, "I would say that I am one who waits,"[50] "lying in wait" for the post-black subject, "as a visionary term delineating an ethical or ideal vision of humanity for all people."[51] The post-black subject would embrace a posthuman discourse in spite of it generating, to borrow from the feminist Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman*, "its own form of inhumanity"[52] in the face of whiteness. Waiting, then, not only suggests hope for a post-black subject to be reimagined, but the expectation or anticipation of "the end of the world," the death of "the Black" and "the White." As it is, there can be no Hegelian reciprocal recognition among blacks and whites because of the nonexistence of the "absolute reciprocity" between two independent self-consciousnesses that for Fanon exist "at the foundation of the Hegelian dialectic."[53] In the meanwhile, blacks "investigate [their] surroundings, [they] interpret everything in terms of what [they] discover, [they] become sensitive"[54] to "all this whiteness that burns [them]."[55]

There remains the problem: whiteness as seemingly self-contained, when, in fact, whiteness relies on blackness for its preeminence. In fact, whiteness can exist only as the immanent possibility of blackness as its assumed opposite (inferior, primitive, unnatural, and impure). In these regards, whiteness is not self-sustaining in that it depends on blackness to give it shape and meaning. In so doing, "whiteness alone," as Toni Morrison cautions, "is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, and implacable."[56] Nonetheless, notwithstanding whiteness parasitic relations to blackness, in its image of self-assemblage, the latter is held imprisoned by the coercive power of the former, in its manifesting itself in two opposite directions; blacks are either outdoing or trying to undo blackness that is performatively acted out. And while there is no genuine blackness beneath the performance, blacks must be black in relation to whites. [57]

The opposite does not hold true; whites can be white exclusive of any relation to blacks[58] because, as Diane Fuss observes, "the sign 'white' exempts itself from a dialectical logic of negativity."[59] To put it differently, "white" is always freed from any dependency on the sign "black" for its symbolic constitution. The opposite holds true for the sign "black" because black functions within a racist discourse, "always diacritically, as a negative term in the Hegelian dialectic continuously incorporated and negated."[60] This phenomenon is what can be labeled "the Negro in comparison," to borrow from Fanon.[61] Michael Jackson and his quandary of identity, as we will see, besides aptly demonstrating the problematics of self-identification for blacks in America, provides a useful starting point to think about the preeminence of whiteness and how it has constructed blackness as the antinormative. In these regards, one cannot help following the works of the two black scholars W. E. B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon on how race, even though it is not a "fact" or a foundational artifact of nature that predates and regulates lives, is, however, viewed as if it were a property of the body organizing blacks' identification process. In this sense, race depends on an assemblage of practices whose immediate and undeviating focus is the body.

In this chapter, I will show that the attempt to construct the category "black" has fundamental implications for racial identification. When blackness is measured against whiteness, it is automatically reduced to otherness. It is, therefore, difficult for a black person to develop a solid sense of "self." And because the black "self" is always constructed as "other," it is constantly interrogated, policed, and subverted by the white gaze. Viewed in this way, racial identification becomes a deeply ambivalent process, leading to the Du Boisian double consciousness, the disintegration of identity into plural identities, which nonetheless is dissolved to a bodily mark, "to skin" where, in the end, blacks are unable to encounter their true "self." And since identity formation, in this sense, is not self-determined and works autonomously from the racial ordering of society in which blacks are "overdetermined from the outside," this manifestation confines them to a liminal and ambivalent space of alterity. It is from this ambivalence that self-identification develops into a condition in which the subjectivity of a black person is always subjugated by a gaze that is directed through the episteme of whiteness. Accordingly, blacks cannot experience their own experiences outside of whiteness.

The Construction of Blackness and Its Implication for a Black Identity

While it is true that gender operates as a visible identity, in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman,"[62] the now accepted fact that gender is socially constructed can be applied to race also as a social concept. This seemingly straightforward conceptualization of how a gender or a race identity is constituted does not mean that gender or race does not exist. In fact, gender or race gives us a better conceptualization of not what gender or race is, but of what it does in terms of its ontology, its epistemology, and its distinctive modalities of visual performance. In the case of race, for example, it is immediately transcribed into a social phenomenon, and the outcome is the bodiliness of racism or, better said, a body that is located within racism. This is precisely what Fanon repeatedly calls the "lived experience of blacks." It is an experience that blacks know firsthand living in a blackphobic society. In the 1995 documentary, *Frantz Fanon*: *Black Skin, White Mask*, Fanon shares his own disturbing story of being denied the full status of a psychiatrist when a white woman refused to see him as a doctor because of his race. This is just one straightforward example of how the body is positioned within racism. Other examples include racial discrimination during job interviews in a blackphobic society; "white flights" from white neighborhoods when blacks move in;[63] blacks being predisposed to racial profiling; and blacks being singled out as criminals. It is through the bodiliness of racism that the appearance of race functions as a hegemonic and forceful power.

In any event, Michael Jackson's video *Black or White* tackles issues of racism and shows how race imprisons blacks' lives. His video attempts to provide an alternative way *to be* (being), to "reimagine the structure of racial identifications" that have dominated race relations in the history of the United States. His words might appear naïve to some when he sings that "[i]t's not about races, just places."[64] However, the real anger expressed in the video is against a form of racism that fixes blacks as the "other thing," a racism that allows grown black men to be addressed as "boy" by devotional racists, as Michael Jackson is called when, on a "thriller killer"[65] night, he takes a white girl (his baby) "on a Saturday bang." "Boy" is meant to humiliate and to irritate. This kind of naming (boy) as a citational practice reduces blacks to second-class citizenry and silences

them. Adrienne Rich, in her work, clearly captured the way silence functions "in a world where language and naming are power" by concluding that silence is "oppression and [psychological] violence."[66] After listening, searching for the words, with great courage Michael Jackson states: "I had to tell them I ain't second to none." His "telling" is not heard because the words of a black person are never heard.[67] In other words, the dominant social positioning of the white listener prevents the possibility of listening to materialize and, more so, the dominant way of "knowing" everything there is to know about blacks informs a certain kind of epistemology that operates as the tyrant of truth.

In fact, because of the charged stereotype of the violent, lawless, primitive, and oversexed black man, black men are basically not to be trusted around white women. This simple fact puts all black men at risk of being literally and symbolically castrated. In the meanwhile, the assumption of whiteness as desire flaunted in the parks; on television; in films, books, magazines, newspapers; on university campuses; in the board rooms of corporations; in the laws, institutions, and systems; in everyday discourse and language; on the streets; at the banks, homeownerships, and courthouses; in hiring and promotions; in attitudes and behaviors; in the doctor's office; on the tram; in neighborhoods; and in the schools and day cares is certainly inescapable and retains the phantasmatic view of itself. In fact, at one time in the United States, a black man couldn't under any circumstances even look at a white woman, much less date her or take her "on a Saturday bang."[68] We all remember the horrifying story of Emmett Till, a black fourteen-year-old boy from Chicago who was murdered by two white men, Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam, in Delta Mississippi on August 28, 1955, for supposedly whistling at a white woman, Carolyn Bryant, in a grocery store.[69] Henry Champly, in *White Women, Coloured Men*, is convinced that black men "have discovered the white woman as an idol worthy of being desired above all else."[70] On this note, Champly begs white women to reject the allure of sexual promiscuity and miscegenation and return to what he calls "erotic humility."[71]

And while white women are positioned as the gender norm, black women are outside of the norm. At the end of the day, it seems to me that it would be an oddity to deny that for black women, gender and race are not mutually exclusive, which brings us to the concept of intersectionality,[72] a term that has been lately introduced into the hermeneutics and analysis of black women's experience of oppression and attempts to explain how sexism, racism, classism, and other forms of oppressive sys-

tems intersect to unequally position black women as the "other." And if there is "an end of racism" as is suggested by some, can we say, then, that an end to racism would automatically change how black women would experience sexism, or how black gays, lesbians, or transpeople would experience discrimination, for example? In any case, it is unquestionable that the visibility of race trumps gender positioning since gender identity is not seen in its entirety. It always shows race as asking to be seen. And since there is no end to how blacks are positioned as raced beings, how race serves the particular purpose of naming the social phenomenon of the bodiliness racism and its broader cultural dynamics to entrap blacks in the realm of corporeality, which attaches social meanings to the racialized body, is not without significance.[73]

Fanon illustrates this in *Black Skin, White Masks* by pointing to the case of a little white boy who, in the face of "seeing" race, cries out, "Look, a Negro! . . . mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Why is the child afraid of a black person? The child must already know that the black person is fearful. And while the child's outburst exemplifies the ways in which the visuality of race is readily transferred to its social meaning, the black body is returned to themself in bad faith as inferior, different, ostracized, and a foil to the white body. Significantly, one might say, then, that this form of black characterologicalism locates its comeback when Fanon writes, with great precision, the following:

> My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the Negro is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself in his mother's arms: Mama the nigger's going to eat me up.[74]

While in this event Fanon draws on "difference embodied"—that is, the body as the material ground for blacks' social existence—he further points out that the black body is returned to them as inferior, as a weight and an annoyance, which rob them of subjectivity and a sense of "self"; that is, of who they actually are. As a result, to "become a self," a black person

is forced to take on another "self," which is not a "self" of one's own choosing. However, in Michael Jackson's case, in his attempts at self-fashioning, he chooses another "self," *not black*, *not white*. Of course, this is not allowed; and, as we will see later, Michael Jackson has to undergo "racial discipline," a form of castigation that both produces and regulates the raced bodies.[75]

This is the reason why any critique of this form of "becoming-self" forced upon black will remain incomplete. We can clearly see that the self that *becomes*, in the Beauvoirian sense, is a false self in the Sartrean sense; a false self, detaching blacks from a self of their own creation and impelling them, in Fanon's words, "to run away from [their] own individuality"—that is, to be uncomfortable by their own presence,[76] to be inauthentic.[77] While this uncomfortableness denotes an absence, a lack, and a stress on the body, "the phenomenological return of the black body"[78] is a "solely negating activity . . . a third person consciousness.[79] In this Fanonian formulation, we get a good idea of how the reciprocal hermeneutic relationship between the physical and social constructs of race as impurity, as the seemingly unnatural state from which the black identity is constituted, and as a social, moral, and aesthetic debasement[80] are made possible. Even more concisely, race is a not just a social construct; it is physical as well. It threatens and obscures black self-identity. As such, it is not I who construct an identity for myself, but it is the identity that was already there, preexisting, awaiting my existence.[81]

We see this clearly with the case of Michael Jackson going against the ascribed black identity as a bodily mark and trying to construct another possible identity, *not black*, *not white*. Michael Jackson, for one, moving between identities *not black*, *not white*, where his body seemingly appears as a site of profound refusal that permits and controls the appearance and knowability of race, by its very existence, unsettles the artificial social fact constituting blacks as an authentic group, which, of course, fuels a habitual anxiety for the social body. Like all blacks in the United States, Michael Jackson, as a racialized "other," is "perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely not-self—that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable,"[82] in which one's identification is in opposition to whiteness as the norm.[83] And this is where Sara Ahmed's work helps us see how and why the dominant structures, systems, ideology, and epistemology enable whiteness sustainability and functionality. As a matter of fact, "whiteness," Ahmed notes, "is what [society] is oriented 'around,' so that even bodies that might not appear white still have to inhabit whiteness, if they are

to get 'in,' "[84] the "space" that is marked White, with a capital W. When blacks appear in "white space," they are viewed as "out of place," "out of space." To put it differently, black bodies stand out when they are "out of place." After all, such "standing out" unsettles and resettles the whiteness of the space.[85]

From the constitutive and hegemonic positioning of whiteness, seemingly, we cannot move beyond the dichotomization of the white self from the black "other." As it happens, it is this very insidious dichotomy that maintains the ultimate conditions of blacks as the antithesis of whites, in categorical terms, as inferior and uncivilized, and shapes and reinforces other cultural images of alterity and stereotypes that determine blacks' identification process. Blackness produces and fashions the milieu for all kinds of ill treatment, including social exclusions and injustice. These experiences are, for the most part, anticipated by the receivers. Yet the anticipation does not erase the pain and humiliation they experience when such occurrences materialize in their daily lives.

Furthermore, the meaning of blackness and its signifiers, such as loud music and hoodies, are formed and produced in such a way that they appeal to racial commonsense, as a technique of the legitimization of power. For instance, Jordan David's loud music and Trayvon Martin's hoodie got them killed by Michael Davis Dunn and George Zimmerman, respectively, leaving no room for a nostalgic return to a class analysis because in the United States class is racialized. Yet, the racialization of class is overlooked so as to make it easier to categorize poor blacks as lacking in *will* and to view them literally as the "underclass," an essential pronouncement which is devoid of any critical analysis as a racist term. To put it in a different way, even when blacks strive for middle- and upper-class status, they always occupy a lobbying and disquieting position. Blacks are always presumed to be lower class, or, what they have been made into, "the underclass." *Am I that name*?, interestingly, continues to be the existential question for all blacks. In other words, while poor blacks are seemingly made to own the signifier "underclass," all blacks are subjected and hailed as the "underclass." And since the fate of the black middle and upper classes remain tied to poor blacks because of the racial dynamic entrenched in the economy, culture, and body politics, an entire citizenry is impacted.

The white self is signified as disparate from the black "other." It is in this instant of demarcation that the privileged matrix for the technique of dominance, in the form of the presumptive hegemony of whiteness—the

interlocking alignment of knowledge, power, spatial position, and history—is fashioned and disseminated. And since whiteness defines blacks not in themselves but as relative to whiteness, in that—whiteness is the "subject," the absolute, and blackness is the "other," the incomplete—blacks are thus led to make an object of their whole selves, to set up themselves as the "other," or, as Fanon explains and describes it, for not only must blacks be black; blacks must be black in relation to whites.[86] This is to say, "on the level of the body image," as "a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls representation, but less than which the realist calls a thing—an existence placed half way between the 'thing' and the representation,"[87] the black person is subordinated to the white person as the "other." Here, I am reminded of Fanon's famous observation: "The real Other for the white [person] is and will continue to be the black [person]."[88]

Also, a black person's "contact with white society has opened new vistas, new ideals in his[/her/their] imagination."[89] Hence, they want to appallingly "behave" like whites, since, to use Sara Ahmed's phase, "to be black in a white world is to turn back towards itself."[90] To sum it up, blacks are the "other" for whites, and for itself a fixed object sealed into a "crushing objecthood"[91] without "ontological resistance"[92] to the white gaze, which reduces blacks to the object of the look where there is *no exist*. The racist interpellation, "Look, a Negro!" or, "Dirty Nigger!" stops a black person in their track.[93] To be stopped "is not just stressful: it makes the 'body' itself the 'site' of social stress."[94] Worse still, to be stopped is to experience negation, to feel "out of place." One finds oneself "becoming neither an 'I' nor a 'not-I' "[95] but basically "an object in the midst of other objects."[96] In a black person's experience, as Fanon reveals, "the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed with a dye."[97] But, what is more, when blacks are viewed as a threat to the social body, as is expressed in the white child's outburst, "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened,"[98] the very body of a black person stresses, fragments, and finally bursts apart. That is, the body is without protection. So, the question is, in its simple rhetorical form, what else could it be for the black person but "an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage" that covered the whole black body with black blood?[99] Is it a blood "which never dries"? The most immediate reaction for the black person is to take oneself off from one's own presence and make oneself "an object."[100] At this point,

one is convinced that a black person "is forever in combat with his own image,"[101] which starts and finishes fiercely fragmented.

But there is something else manifesting itself in blacks' struggle for self-determination, which is of great signification. Given that blacks have access to whiteness as terrorizing, hostile, and aggressive, blacks are equipped with a gift to conceive how things are arranged and seen. They are endowed with the great power of discernment, or what W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* calls "a second sight," a second way of seeing that "resees"; that is, that sees again otherwise; in this particular case, they see whiteness in an evaluative mode.[102] bell hooks, in her chapter "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," in a less optimistic and unsurprising mode, explains her students' discomfort to learn that blacks critically evaluate whites. For hooks, her students' amazement that the gaze of blacks is directed toward whites does not stop there. What can be derived from the discomfort is about whites who get it wrong, who think too highly of themselves, and, in the process, as hooks rightfully assesses, this discomfort "is an expression of racism,"[103] which is not just systematic but is expressed in what can be called "racism in talk." It is "in talk" that hooks's white students make known the mere conceitedness of whiteness. Crucial to this position of hooks's students, by the way, is the existence of "racism in talk" expressed as a form of psychic projection where the dominant group (the "I") projects and the subordinated "other" (the "them") is projected upon.[104] I take it, then, that such a form of racism equips all whites with "talk" that suggests a false sense of ontological superiority over blacks,[105] which, nonetheless, implies a certain kind of confidence and comfort in its expression.[106]

Following from this, of course, is to see that while the black experience "is not a whole," in that there is not merely one black, there are blacks,[107] there is nonetheless an ontological specificity of blackness, given that blackness is constructed against the concept of race as "overdetermined from the outside." How, then, does blackness construct and uphold a black identity that is associated with the norms of racial identification? And what are the implications for the lived experience of blacks in the United States? These are the questions that are inevitably brought to light, suggesting that one way to come to terms with the "lived experience of blacks" is, as I have hinted before, to take into consideration a complicated articulation that a black person through blackness constructivism becomes black but can never be black. To think of this differently, from

the beginning in the United States, the construction of blackness and of those who fashioned, elaborated, and upheld it was and continues to primarily be a group of white men.[108] Marilyn Frye's *The Politics of Reality* makes an influential contribution to help us see the syncretizing power of maleness and whiteness. Blackness, then, in Frye's important intervention, to borrow from her, "is *their* construct."[109]

Sadly, what is often overlooked is that blacks' untainted beings are not yet known to the white world. Fanon responds to this with enthusiasm and certainty. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon lets us see that "no one knows yet who [the black] is, but he knows that fear will fill the world when the world finds out. And when the world knows the world always expects something of the Negro. He is afraid lest the world knows, he is afraid of the fear that the world would feel if the world knew."[110] For now, any attempt of blacks to show to the world that they are bestowed with honorable and exulted capacities—that is, "to write themselves into being,"[111] (*to be*) contra nonbeing (*not to be*)—is what Fanon defines as "existence," the quotidian production of blacks' lives consolidated by antiblack racism, a multidimensional schema of conditions, facts, undertakings, and practices in excess, expressed, for example, in police violence directed at blacks. Other forms of antiblack racism can be seen in the growing poverty in black communities, as the number of black ghettos and superghettos increases, and a large prison population is black and on death row.

Meanwhile, blacks' existence is, of course, an artifact of the white world. It is an acceptance of blackness as acceptable truths about the racialized body. Here are some of the effects, according to Charles Mills's "An Illuminating Blackness": "Blackness really indicates not a particular brand of wavelengths but a particular social position, and not any subordinated nonwhite position but a particular location within the nexus of multiple oppressions created by white supremacy,"[112] insofar as it leaves whiteness normalized. At the same time, normalization makes it possible to individualize, to measure gaps to differentiate according to the norm whose function, while constraining all deviations by its standard measures, makes differences intelligible. However, when blackness enters the terrain, intelligibility falls through the cracks, like an addict waiting for a fix or a person straddled on a desert with no food or water. So, what we can say about normalization is that it "keeps watch over the excessive and the exceptional, delimiting the outcast who threatens the order of normalcy"[113] that is construed from the perspective of whiteness: one, white-

ness, claiming for itself the grand position of transcendental signifier, allows for whites to draw their ideological power from being unraced and unmarked; two, whiteness continuously elevates itself over the category of blackness; and three, whiteness asserts itself as "an essential something"[114] and as a form of property that only whites own. Certainly, the ownership of a property, a "possessive investment," is not simply transportable and, in some cases, is nonnegotiable.

In fact, whites do not need to be members of white-supremacist groups to hold on to their "possessive investment" in their whiteness. White privilege perceived as expected and accepted is constantly embraced and affirmed by both whites and blacks. This is a good illustration of how the social and epistemological facts of whiteness have projected unto society particular ways of acting, feeling, thinking, and knowing; in other words, of what it means to be white. Needless to say, while blacks have accepted whiteness normality, whites have been confined and conditioned by whiteness habitus, which, as I have already mentioned, can connect habits to what is unconscious and unchanging, or what becomes a "second nature," is to suggest that whiteness is what bodies do or can do. And while the performativity of whiteness is preserved and enhanced in accordance with the norms of whiteness, it worsens when it is assumed to be incognito; that is, when it goes unrecognized.[115] Whiteness, as invisible to whites, held sway until the recent rise of whiteness studies as a framework for analyzing and conceptualizing the importance for whites, in Cheryl I. Harris's sense, to recognize and acknowledge their "property rights in whiteness."[116]

On the other hand, black is so black that it is now "blue"; that is, blue as in the blues where the blues singer Louis Armstrong, in his song "Black and Blue," lets us know, "my only sin is my skin."[117] The problem before us, in this regard, is that skin is a social and corporeal attribute ascribed to blackness as distinct from whiteness as the norm.[118] In a word, blackness is "like itself," in Sara Ahmed's phrase, "a form of family resemblance."[119] It extends "the family form. Other members of the race are 'like a family,' just as the family is defined in racial terms. The analogy works powerfully to produce a particular version of family, predicted on 'likeness,' where likeness becomes a matter of 'shared attributes,' "[120] skin color. And while "share" is often referred to as having something in common, "likeness is a sign of inheritance; to look like a family is to look alike."[121] The strength of Ahmed's remarks, as I understand them, is that a "good likeness" is not enough. As a result, to say that in this, "all blacks look alike" and

other idioms that group all blacks as the "same" is to make blacks feel uncomfortable in their skin, exposed, visible, and different from those who are "being like" whites.[122] And since blacks are reduced to a bodily mark that is visible, important differences among blacks are overlooked.

The visible indication of blackness becomes the ground for the slow production of the "historico-racial schema." That is to say, the deposited personal experience of the bodiliness of racism that obfuscates the development of blacks' "bodily schema," which is culturally fashioned by racist discourse and "is the definitive structuring of self and of the world," creating a "dialectic between [the black body] and the world"[123] in such a way that the formation of a "self" advances through interaction with not only other objects but also with the "thousands of details, anecdotes, stories"[124] out of which blackness has been woven out of whiteness. Blacks therefore exist as a communal subject whose principal misrepresentation is not personal but social. In the meanwhile, the black body "is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty."[125] Agreeably, it is from this perspective that antiblackness and its problematics are materialized.

Blackness and Its Problematics

If race is affiliated with blackness as a social category and a social reality, the construction of blackness presents the problem of race and racism as two overlapping but sharply differentiated occurrences. In fact, racism makes sure that blacks have little or no range of personal choice, entitlement, and power. Indeed, racism produces race. Race, then, must be located within the presumptive hegemony of whiteness that gives blackness its othered status. And since, in the United States, the coherence of the outsideness of blackness is upheld, reinforced, and maintained through racist discourse, epistemology, and ideology, it is not without remorse that our attention is drawn to how racism hamstrings blacks and generates benefits for whites even if whites are trying to unlearn their racism and recognize their privileged position. In a word, being white safeguards whites from the distresses that blacks a posteriori encounter living with racism.

Michael Jackson, for one, desires a world beyond racism, as we see in his video *Black or White*, for example. And although Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror" is disconnected from the real causes of oppression, desires a world beyond the economy of racism, and suggests that "if you

want to make the world a better place take a look at yourself, and then make a change,"[126] it is the philosopher Naomi Zack who persuasively reminds us that blacks "cannot effectively resist racism from within a racialized identity."[127] In such a view, being racially othered reduces a black person to marginalization. When one acts from the margins, one is indeed viewed as tactless. And this affects one at the level of their own subjectivity. And since the "other" is always ascribed a racial identity, in drawing attention to this, it makes sense to ask, what it means, then, to reject a black identity as Michael Jackson does in his song "Black or White": "I'm not going to spend my life being a color,"[128] he confesses. Does this free one from the perniciousness that goes along with one's so-called blackness? Indeed, it is not so easy to escape from the perils of "racial constructivism," which includes, as Charles Mills describes, "an actual agreement of some under conditions where the constraints are not epistemic (getting at the truth) but political (establishing and maintaining [white] privilege)."[129] Along the same line, the ontological question *what is a black?* is hard to answer because of the outsideness of blackness, which is instantaneously recognizable as the inessential "other thing"—violent, immoral, hypersexual, evil, savage, abnormal, and uncivilized in the relations to a whiteness void of racial imperfections and nonthreatening.[130] Clearly, the outsideness of blackness assumes these negative characteristics. It is made clear and it is often reinforced by what Judith Butler, in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, refers to as "media framing"; that is, the many ways in which the media's rhetoric, language, ideology, and discourse produced an implicit image of blacks as criminals, for example, and how this image corresponds to the political, legal, and social discourses that indoctrinate many whites' views about blacks. It is no wonder that the white child panics on seeing blackness and cries out, "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!"[131]

To be black is always, as the titles of Michael Jackson's albums have it, to be *Bad* and *Dangerous*. Blacks are generally considered as a threat to the white social space. Whites do in fact become very anxious when they are in close proximity to those they see as more or less radically different and assume their inherent inferiority and barbaric ways. We do remember that when whiteness became anxious, the Jim Crow laws were enacted. The General Allotment Act (The Dawes Severalty Act) of 1887 followed, which brought the annihilation of First Nations communities. Other Acts (laws) included the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, The Immigration Act of 1924, the Tydings-McDuffe Act of 1934, and the Japanese internment

camps. Today, the actions and practices of anxious whiteness are proliferated in state violence, white flights, racial profiling, urban renewal programs, and gated communities.

Given that these gated communities are marked *Whites Only*, blacks who try to enter these spaces are always under surveillance, watched, policed, controlled, and registered as nonmembers. They are literally considered as "out of place" in "this space" like a piece of trash, a piece of dirt that is "out of place" in one's bedroom, kitchen, or living room,[132] which does not belong there and thus must be discarded, removed, and returned to its "proper" place. The act of "registering those who are out of place" actually serves to "create strangers and establish a direction toward them, as those who threaten the place of the 'in place,' as those who generate anxiety"[133] for the white social body. And given that space operates as one of the chief signifiers of racial differences, openness of movement within space turns out to be a white prerogative.[134] Whiteness, in this sense, is viewed as nonthreatening even though it always threatens and terrorizes a body that is "out of place." Indeed, when whiteness views itself as benign, as nonthreatening, dare I say, it endorses a phantasmatic view of itself, which leaves blackness as "a problem," in the Du Boisian sense.[135] To say the least, one can hear whites remarking that blacks make themselves "a problem." "What's wrong with blacks?" But the truth is that blacks a priori are made "a problem" so that whiteness can be constituted unproblematically.

The crucial point here is that blacks are reduced to their black skin and are deprived of alternative identitarian means. When whites see blacks as black, it is to see enough because blackness conjures "false seeing"; that is to say, the inability of whites to "see" the unseen epistemologies, ideologies, and practices that have shaped their negative beliefs about blacks in a world in which whites see themselves as the bona fide members.[136] This is why, as John Berger demonstrates, "the relationship of what we see and what we [believe] is never settled."[137] In other words, because what we "see" is, for the most part, influenced by what we believe, the way we "see" or don't see is predisposed by what we already believe. Because blackness is believed to be the invisible and unrecognizable standard that continues to negate and marginalize a black person, "to see him[/her/them] as black is not to see him[/her/them] at all. His[/her/their] presence is a form of absence."[138] Regardless of class location, through the hermeneutics of the graphicality of blackness, blacks are positioned in a world that forces them to be like Ralph Ellison's "invisible man" who is "seen" and yet not "seen."

After all, no individual or group that is positioned outside of whiteness can sustain itself properly.

What Is at Stake for Blacks?

The construction of a black identity as a bodily mark, an open site of otherness, imposes itself on blacks who try to abide by such an imposition. The bodily mark has a "high social profile," in the sense that it affects how the racialized body is observed and responded to. In addition, the bodily mark of race conditions blacks to the worst effects of the others' gaze and paves the way for the grouping of blacks into a racialized category, which in turn shapes and determines how blacks are positioned in a world that offers them no true self-consciousness but lets them see themselves through the revelation of whiteness. In entering this discussion, we need to draw from W. E. B. Du Bois's "double consciousness" as one of the key problems of blacks' existence, which lends itself to the significant question: What does it mean to be black in the United States, to have an identity that first and foremost is determined by the color of your skin? This issue, I think, can be imaginatively responded to by turning to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon declares that the black person has difficulties in developing their sense of self.

Blacks draw their power from either performing whiteness, to undo "blackness," or to outdo blackness. In both ways, it is a certain refusal of prescribed identification. Indeed, to undo "blackness" is another way to be positioned as the ex-colored man as is depicted in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, where the black man imitates whiteness and "passes" for white. In performing whiteness, does he do so naturally, without, to use Fuss's words, "that coefficient of play, of imitation,"[139] characterizing whiteness? Is it possible to separate the imitation from what is not imitated, which in this case is blackness? Does he (the black man) still remain largely outside of whiteness because there is no authenticity behind the performance? So, is he pierced by a sensation of not having a "true" identity? To avoid the harsh realities of living in a blackphobic society, the black man submits himself to another kind of ridicule, to a racial in-betweenness, *not black*, *not white*, which, as Michael Jackson as an artist exemplifies, still signals an unavoidable blackness revealed by the performative function of race culturally identified in his dance style.

Nonetheless, the singer's in-betweenness as an ever-changing and self-contradictory subject position maintains identity continuously at arm's length and keeps it uncertain. It is exactly identity that is deferred by the work of identification, identity that remains in a state of exile, "gathering place." In other words, Michael Jackson's racial in-betweenness, *not black*, *not white*, is in constant interpretations, caught in, in Fuss's term, "a system of cultural relays"[140] that make his racial identity complex and irresistible to debates. This leads to name-calling and othering as in "Michael Jackson is a freak or is weird." Weirdness, in the face of blackness, in no uncertain terms, pervades the tabloids. Furthermore, weirdness or freakiness is subject to the most extreme form of disparagement because blackness constructs a body that is already defiant of social norms.

On the other hand, the outdoing of blackness is a part of the newfangled discrete variant of African American culture, a "crucial site in the struggle over power, identity, and meaning"[141] that progressively reconfigures itself through rap and hip-hop music, dance, dress, and Ebonics as foils to white social norms and leaves antiblackness in place. Touré's *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness: What It means to Be Black Now* makes use of the term "postblackness." "Postblackness," indeed, "points . . . to the end of the reign of a narrow single notion of Blackness."[142] It resignifies the end to "blackness" constructivism as pathology. Maybe, it is to embrace blacks' pathology "without the pathos; to create a transvaluation of pathos itself";[143] to move blackness away from the distinguishing norms of recognition as a bodily mark. Yet, what unites blacks with each other is not merely a bodily mark, the unmistakable blackness, "like itself," its outsideness; to be sure, it is the visceral pain that accompanies blackness outsideness that blacks share, which Achille Mbembe attempts, in his lecture at Duke University, to explain as "the politics of viscerality." As I understand it, "the politics of vicerality" is another way to think of how racial violence, for example, is played out "in our viscera, in our experience, and our internal-felt self," which, by extension, is a form of anxiety for blacks because it is there, in the body, that the actual outcomes of racist discourses and acts are realized.

In any event, my concern here is that through cultural practices, epistemologies, visual representations, and the matrices of power and discourse, blacks, for the most part, have internalized cognitive and evaluative schema that replicate whiteness, and it is not easy for any black person, even if he is the King of Pop, not to uphold an austere regime

of self-censorship. One reason for this is that blacks depend on such a representation for their existence. Even if blacks work hard at creating "another" identity, as is the case of Michael Jackson, in the end, it is not how one defines oneself, but how a racist society constructs and defines blacks that matters. What comes to mind is how a black identity, for instance, was defined by the one-drop rule (of blood), which established that a person "having any African blood in their veins" is black and created the pressure for blacks who pass as whites to assimilate whiteness. We get from James Weldon Johnson, in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, that while passing is an important means for enjoying white privilege, the psychological cost of passing is very often greater than the reward. It is a case of self-alienation. The case of Anatole Broyard is illustrative. Broyard "wanted to be a writer, not a black writer. So, he chooses to live a lie rather than be trapped by the truth" of blackness, "an identity that other people have invented and he had no say in."[144] He shed his black identity to become a writer, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. remarks, "who writes endlessly about shedding a past and an identity."[145] This is a good example of the psychological debts of running away from blackness to take on whiteness.

On the other hand, "what is it about whiteness," as the cultural critic Kobena Mercer asks, "that makes the white subject want to be black?"[146] I suppose, these days, it is hip for some urban white kids to "act black";[147] that is, to willfully repeat the stereotypes of African American pop culture and adopt a "black" persona in their verbal communication, dress, hairstyle, and music with the hope to take on some form of "honorary blackness." This is to say, as Mercer does, "a kind of strategic self-othering in relation to the dominant cultural norms."[148] In some cases, it may be a desire on the part of whites to outdo blacks in their "blackness" and to exceed the logics of blackness as a notable determination to make it more "other" than the Others,[149] which is to say, of course, "do blackness" and identify, for example, with the hip-hop culture.

An important question: Can "honorary blackness" be extended to "race changing?" To get at the heart of this matter, let us take the case of Jane Lazarre's *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness: Memoir of a White Mother of Black Sons*. To speak, as Lazarre does, of the tensions between having white skin and rejecting whiteness and taking on blackness (honorary blackness) as her social identity is of great signification. In other words, as Lazarre sees it, her social identity as "black" is hidden by her white skin. Is her "crossing over" or "passing over" to blackness an

example of "race changing"? And even though Lazarre's actions are well meant, to "cross over" racial boundaries, or "crossing" in every sense, is a privilege reserved only for whites.

"Honorary blackness" is not conditional, itinerant, or temporal, as is the entry of blacks into "honorary whiteness," which is a racially charged category wrongly projecting the inertia of race and its ontological status. And while paradoxically, "honorary whiteness" claims also to be colorblind—that is, not to see race—it signifies racial difference precisely through its framework. "Honorary whiteness" is in fact more about passing as the "right kind" of black, those who work hard not to make whiteness apprehensive and to repress the notion "to rock the boat" in a sea of whiteness. Even though nothing good can spring from "the sea of whiteness," "honorary whiteness" inscribes and prescribes that blacks can simply never be white. In a word, *to be like* whites is never the same as *to be* white. And while passing these days is about securing a license for entry into "honorary whiteness," as with the several examples I have already provided, "black is black."[150] It is true that blacks can enter "the white world," as Cheryl I. Harris cogently puts it, "albeit [it is] a false passport, not merely passing but trespassing."[151] It is not surprising, then, that if "honorary whiteness" can be bestowed, it can also be withdrawn.

It is hard for a black person to "cross over" because to be "black" is determined not from the "inside" but is overdetermined from the "outside." Once again, blackness outsideness as overburdened and saturated by racist interpellations such as "Look, a Black! See that Black! I am frightened!" cannot be disavowed. The certainty and undoubtedly "fact of blackness" is what Jared Sexton calls with Orlando Patterson "social death,"[152] "the social life of social death."[153] In other words, blacks' lives are not yet lived in a world where whiteness is the norm. We do need to repeat, here, that a norm is never originary; it is a response to the anti-normative—in this case, blackness, which precedes whiteness. In other words, blackness is *ante*-normative.

Consider, on this score, that "honorary black," as Mercer puts it, "encodes an antagonistic subject position on the part of the white subject in relation to the normative codes of [whiteness],"[154] and "honorary blacks," however, still enjoy the countless privileges that come with white skin. As far as I can tell, "honorary blackness" does not actually signal an ontological shift in whiteness; that is to say, these "honorary blacks" cannot feel the pains that come with blackness as a bodily mark. Keeping in mind that race is inscribed on the body, blacks are unable to transcend

their race as the signifier that works to promote ill treatment of them. Other identity markers such as gender, class, sexuality, speech and language impairment, and disability have been put out of articulation because of race, a matter of racial law, an all-encompassing affinity to a black identity. So, what does this say about the respect for identities (in the plural) as is prescribed by identity politics whose present phase is multiculturalism, where the emphasis apparently is no longer on cultural assimilation (the melting pot) but the recognition and celebration of differences?[155] Yet, differences among blacks, women, and sexual minorities, for example, have to be disregarded in the name of the politics of difference.

In fact, Michael Jackson's videos, from *Beat It* to *Thriller* with various forms of ensemble dance, are made to "heal differences," in David Brackett's words.[156] But, in reality, while race defines one's cultural identity and one is made to feel that cultural pride would prove and make good one's difference in skin color, in fact, it is an endless reminder that one is different.[157] In this respect, difference is comprehended as cultural specificity; that is, as what is culturally different about an individual whose meaning, at the very least, is tied to race as the signifier. Or, put slightly differently, identity becomes synonymous with difference (otherness) as one illustration of how multiculturalism, for example, developing from a racialist ontology, cannot resist the trappings of promoting cultural otherness. This would mean, significantly, that we do agree with Walter Benn Michaels's conclusion that cultural recognition "is a form of racism."[158] What we have here is another form of the "new racism" veiled with cultural reasoning, the redemptive project for the toleration (and toleration here is the key) of cultural differences as obligation. It is, in other words, that culture is the metonym for race.

Blacks who try to deviate from the cultural norms of whiteness by developing their own sense of style in their clothes, hairstyles, walk, and talk, as attempted willful acts of resistance, which are self-affirming and sustaining and which amount to "be black," are not to be taken for granted. And even though acts of resistance are inevitable within relations of domination, for the most part, these acts are taken to be "ghetto" in nature. As a result, these acts are indeed not without their critics and, for the most part, confronted by oppositions, sometimes even from other blacks. And if it is important to draw this out, it is precisely to point out how resistance to whiteness, in terms of other ways of knowing and being in the world, returns blacks to racist stereotypes even from members of both their ascribed group and other racially marginalized groups.

Michael Jackson's self-identification process, a severe redundancy of artifactual racial otherness of the sort that it made possible, for example, with hair straightening and dyeing, and countless plastic surgeries, is criticized with a great amount of harshness. However, what is revealed—a kind of unsurprising revelation—is that Michael Jackson's act of self-expression is read as outside the recognizable norm of race assignment, *not black*, *not white*, as another form of continual misidentification, playing a foundational role in the dialectic of *not black* ("other") and *not white* (the self's "other") while concealing the essentially "ambivalent structure of identification"[159] for blacks, which can lead to social and psychological harms. It also, too often, as with the case of Michael Jackson, leads to oversimplifications such as assuming that the singer is deliberately destroying his African physiognomy in order to "become" "white." I try to dissect this oversimplification by examining Michael Jackson and racial identification in the next chapter.